

Anna M. Burke
Christopher F. Burke
27 Sylvan Court
Saunderstown, RI 02874

February 19, 2009

Representative Andrew Fleischmann
Co-Chair, Education Committee
LOB – Room 3101
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Co-Chairman Andrew Fleischmann and Members of the House Education Committee:

We are the parents of Lindsay Ann Burke, a college graduate with a degree in elementary and special education, who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend at the age of 23. Chris is a culinary arts teacher at our state's vocational high school and Ann is a health teacher in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. We ask you to consider the following and we urge you to pass HB6494 which requires teen dating violence education in your schools, although we do so with a heavy heart.

Like most people, we knew little of abusive relationships, and Lindsay was never educated about this major health issue in school either. Despite support from family and friends, she was murdered after leaving the relationship for the third time. After her death we began to research the what, how, and why this happened to her and were outraged by what we learned. We were sickened to learn how much control one romantic partner could have over the other and how much psychological devastation takes place within the victim, regardless of their prior self-esteem or confidence. Most importantly, it was the alarming statistics for teen dating violence that caught our attention, along with the fact that the federal government had previously urged states to encourage public schools to take the issue of dating violence education upon themselves.

Domestic violence was declared to be an epidemic in our country twenty years ago by Surgeon General Dr. Koop. The American Journal of Preventive Medicine wrote "Domestic abuse is an epidemic. But it flies under the radar, because of the stigma and shame associated with it". Twenty years ago we recognized HIV to be a serious health problem and our government made sure that we educated a nation, starting with our children in school. Our children continue to be educated about HIV through our health classes as this has been mandated. The teen dating violence statistics are alarming (please see attached stats). Dating violence destroys people and kills people too. Why aren't we educated about this health topic as well? This has to end.

Health teachers teach about many other important health topics, like drugs and family life education. We teach these topics through our comprehensive health education curriculum, all in an age-appropriate manner. We believe teaching about teen dating violence and the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships is just as

important, if not more important than any of these topics. It also leads to other health problems such as teen pregnancy, eating disorders, depression, and drug abuse. And as such, teen dating violence needs to be taught through our comprehensive health curriculum. Teen dating violence, just like domestic violence, cuts across all lines of race, socio-economic status, educational background, etc. That is why EVERYONE needs to know ALL the facts about this topic. Teens have a right to know this information and parents have a right to know this information. Lindsay had a right to know this information too. It's too late to help her, but not too late to help others.

This bill will do just that. It will provide our youth, school staff, and parents with the knowledge and skills to help themselves and others. And it will lift the surrounding stigma allowing victims to come forward more easily, and abusers to recognize their behaviors and seek help.

How many more daughters must we lose at the hands of an abusive partner? How many more teens have to suffer silently in an abusive relationship, fearing for their lives, yet afraid to tell anyone? Most people know little about the dynamics of teen dating violence; most people don't know how to help or respond properly to a victim. This has to end. We have school policies and provide education for bullying and harassment. The same needs to be done for dating violence. In fact, dating violence is the third piece of a comprehensive violence prevention package.

Passage of HB6494 will be a giant step forward in providing the necessary and proper education for teens, school staff, and parents. We cannot protect ourselves against that of which we do not know. Education is prevention. We urge you to pass HB6494. It is the right thing to do. It is long overdue.

Sincerely,

Ann Burke

Chris Burke